

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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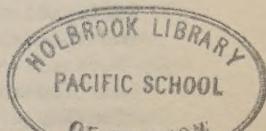
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THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATION TO LAND

By Brooks Hays *



There is an old adage that the lawyers like to quote: "Social opinion should always be in advance of law and the greater or less happiness of the people depends upon the narrowness of the gulf between them." (Sir Henry Maine) The Christian's interest in land is, therefore, centered less in legal concepts than the moral principles which underlie them. The Christian's hope for ethical relationship requires that the law retain its flexible and dynamic character, that legal formulations be responsive to human needs, and that educational groundwork for legal reforms be ethically directed.

It is the purpose of this article to deal broadly with the relations involved in land tenure and crop cultivation. Considering first the primary idea of ultimate ownership, to whom does land belong? According to the Psalmist, "The earth is the Lord's" and in the sense that all resources which man controls should be impressed with a sense of stewardship, this is the first rule for the Christian. Its legal parallel is the common law view that all land is subject to social control. To paraphrase the Hebrew statement, "The earth belongs to God's children." This is not too loose an application of the scripture, for all through the Bible it is apparent that a fruitful and humanitarian use is expected of those who possess "the Lord's earth."

It is utterly impossible to conceive of ownership except in relation to man. Individual claim to particular parts of these resources is recognized because of the ethical claim which springs out of certain services and for the further reason that limited individual ownership is an effective device for the proper use of the land.

The Christian religion is one of justice and right dealing, and these elements must characterize the Christian's attitude. While society's claims must be recognized, the rights of individuals must also be recognized, and it is Christianity's duty to preserve a proper balance between the two. This involves protection against arbitrary seizures and assures the individual that the spot of earth which he tends and protects will not be taken from him unless a definitely superior social claim arises and then only with adequate compensation. It is use and occupancy, however, that are important—not abstract legal title. We have often made a fetish of title and have neglected to build a set of principles governing occupancy. One of the greatest contributions to be made by religion to the solution of the land problem is the defining of reciprocal rights and duties of those who own and those who occupy land.

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At the base of many difficulties regarding land tenure are imperfect human relations. The Christian plea for justice "man to man" should be directed to all interests: (1) owner, (2) tenant (including the farm laborer), and (3) the consumer of farm products. Certain obligations rest upon all of these groups. All occupants, for example, should love the land. Only those who love it can properly conserve and use it and only those who love it should live upon it.

The owner, if he be guided by Christian principles, will not want too much land. Whether a given amount is too much depends upon his ability to administer it for the welfare of those who work upon it as well as for his own profit. No formula is available for determining how many acres are too much. It will vary for different types of farming. The skill of the owner as an administrator is a large factor. Some owners can efficiently manage a larger number of acres than others. This is an unexplored field for Christian ethics, although the general teachings on the subject of acquisitiveness should certainly apply. We have only lately come to recognize that land speculation is immoral. The amount of tillable land is limited; the managerial skill of men is limited. These two facts add up to the desirability of having a standard as to the size of holding so that management and the extent of holdings are brought into proper correlation.

The acquisition of valuable agricultural land for hunting purposes and for summer homes is creating a great problem, especially in thickly settled rural areas where such land purchases result in dispossession of those engaged in farm pursuits. Legislation may be required to meet this situation. Since land law is merely the assertion of moral judgment as to the use of property, society may resort to statutory limitations on the amount and the character of use of land held by both individuals and corporations.

Farm labor has a greater stake in management than it has generally recognized. Those of us who emphasize human needs sometimes fail to appreciate this. As the laborer is worthy of his hire so the manager is worthy of his hire. The trouble is that management has gotten all mixed with high finance, and when that happens, exploitation of farm workers follows. Generally it is the capital charge and not the management fee that takes an inordinate share of the farm returns. The resident owner-manager who accepts his ownership as a social charge will adopt generous policies toward his workers and tenants, but this is hardly possible for the manager who is under pressure to show a big dividend for the absentee owners.

It is this ownership complex that plagues us. It has plagued even the Congress of the United States, which has not yet been able to shake off the false formula of ownership in attempting to raise the farmers' income through parity payments. In some instances, the size of parity checks has operated as an encouragement to increase holdings and displace other farmers, thereby accentuating the basic problem. The world has been in the grip of the ownership concept as distinguished from the service concept so long that the Christian conscience needs to be stirred on this subject of land acquisitiveness.

Secondly, the owner should not live so far from his land as to deprive its occupants of his supervision and constant attention to their needs. Absentee ownership is one of the worst obstructions to the development of a Christian rural society. There are exceptions, of course, particularly where the absentee adopts special measures to avoid the disadvantages caused by his absence. Frequent visits and a quickened conscience as to the responsibilities of ownership are essential if the Christian standard is maintained. Ownership by finance corporations presents one of the greatest problems in applying this standard. They are often, though not always, willing to sell their holdings, and a more liberal credit arrangement for the transfer of these lands to the occupants would be a great social benefit.

The effect of absenteeism is seen in the physical appearance of the farms. Housing and sanitation are seldom up to standards maintained by the resident-owner. The health of the farm workers is a matter of personal rather than economic concern. The landlords who are nearby are the ones who extend the extra-contractual services that tend to alleviate the tenants' condition. This is a natural result of resident operation.

This comment on the superiority of resident management over absenteeism will not be construed, I hope, as an apologia for the tenancy system as now operated. No indictments of that system, however, should be predicated on the assumption that landowners as a class are devoid of human kindness. To the extent that personal factors enter into the equation, the fault is inherent in human nature itself. We are all too unyielding in our thinking when vested interests are involved. However, support may be found for land reforms in the landed group itself. The Duke of Richmond contributed much to the 19th century reforms in England, and it is not impossible for the same progressiveness to be developed among individual owners in this country, although as a class they will oppose change.

The third rule for the owner in developing a Christian standard is to divide the profits of the land equitably with renters and workers. The question arises why not leave such matters to the law of economics. Economic law does not work in this case for the reason that tenants have no bargaining power. A surplus farm population depresses farm wages just as surplus commodities depress prices. (This is, of course, not the only factor in the low wage situations on farms.) Unless ethical considerations are invoked, standards will continue to be low and injustices will be tolerated.

Whether a particular share-rent arrangement is fair or unfair depends upon a lot of circumstances. We used to have a neighbor in Arkansas who was known as "One-Fifth Johnson" because he always rented his land for a fifth instead of the usual fourth of the cotton production. However, little is to be expected from such individual deviations from established custom, although the owner's example in this case was calculated to encourage fair dealing. I doubt that share tenants who own their work stock and tools would complain about the current division of crops, but they would have something to say about ginning and commissary charges which are bound up in the rent relationship. It is well known that ginning has often been operated on an unfair basis and that wide discriminations exist in assessing the charges. Some landowners use their knowledge of the cotton and cottonseed markets to speculate with these products without dividing such profits with the tenants in accordance with the spirit of their partnership crop arrangement. The landowner who would work out a Christian policy should examine carefully all practices in connection with processing and marketing as well as producing to be sure that an ethical division of all farm income is made.

Finally, the owner as the dominant partner in the land relationship should respect the renter. This involves a quality that lies outside the economic sphere, one that requires a recognition of the worth of the tenant as a person. The owner may wish to terminate the arrangement as soon as he can legally do so; he may feel that he has been deprived of his rights as an owner, but the Christian standard implies something more fundamental than these strict legal and economic considerations. On the part of both owner and renter, it often requires patience and forbearance. It is not something one can acquire quickly—it comes like other Christian graces with practice. Something very valuable in human relations is lacking when a land tenure relationship rests wholly on economic interests. For example, the share-crop arrangement, as the South knows it, represents a deterioration. Whatever the reason for the change, the original idea of a partnership in which one furnished land and the other his labor has ceased to be a partnership based on confidence and has become an employment, unfortunately accompanied by distrust in many cases.

The passage of lien laws, practically all of which were in the interest of the owner, tended to overemphasize the coercive aspects of rent collection, with the result that many of the best tenants left the plantations rather than endure the hurts to pride. Lack of a sense of responsibility on the part of many who remained called for more stringent laws and the new laws only added to the friction between the parties, so a vicious circle was formed.

The Christian attitude was stated by Paul as the basis for a practical and just relationship—"To the husbandman that laboreth shall be the first fruits of his labor"—not all the fruits but the first fruits and impliedly a sufficient share of them, and if this simple principle could be established as a universal working rule for farm operations, many un-Christian attitudes would disappear.

The Christian's relation to land also embraces obligations on the part of the tenant and farm worker. There is first the same duty to conserve the soil that rests upon the owner and the further duty to the owner to protect the improvements. This is not easy, for one-third of our nearly three million tenants move every year. It requires a moral sense to impose the restraints that are necessary to this conservation where the renters' hold on the land is so tenuous. Society's offense on this point is a great one. We who work on the public side of the problem were rebuked by one tenant who said, "Every politician ought to be a tenant for a while—about the third time the dust of an Alabama road settled on his household stuff, he'd decide something ought to be done." To permit a system to exist in which there is no security for the tenant is unpardonable, but the tenant is not relieved thereby from the obligation to avoid abuse to the physical properties.

There are other reciprocal duties on the tenants' part. They revolve around the owners' duty as set out above to respect the tenant. The renter owes the same respect to the owner. To deserve security, he must seek the confidence and trust that spring out of a regard for the person with whom he deals. He must not suffer the forfeiting of that respect for frivolous reasons, but as a Christian seek to place the personal relations of the contract above technical rights.

Finally, what is society's duty? We do not know what the pattern of American farm life will look like when we complete the establishment of an ethical base for its operations. It is a big country

and with its varied crops and markets there will be room for various types of farm administration. In general, however, we know that there must be a wider distribution of land and of opportunities in connection with it. The three alternatives seem to be: (1) the family type farm with cooperative ownership of expensive facilities; (2) cooperative leasing or ownership of land as well as facilities; (3) private or corporate ownership of extensive holdings with legally imposed standards of housing, sanitation and other living conditions (or to be achieved by collective bargaining with farm workers, although collective bargaining is never a complete assurance of justice, since some will likely be attached to farm life who cannot come within the protective influences of any economic power). There must be better access to urban markets and finer cooperation between producer and consumers. Consumer chiseling as well as producer profiteering must be outlawed. The agricultural drive for ethical principles is, therefore, bound up in the problem of establishing justice in the entire economic system.

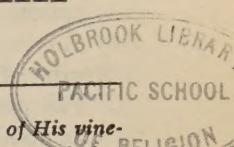
The Hebrews laid down important precepts for the use of agricultural lands, some of which have not been improved upon. With a basically religious approach they adopted practical measures for protecting the interests of all groups in the population. There was the year when the field lay fallow, for example, which was probably a provision for the destitute and landless. During the one year in seven in which the tract was idle, those who were without land or other means of support had access to it for production of food. It was this, rather than conservation, that was responsible for the rule. While there is some doubt as to these Levitical land laws actually being put into operation, according to Dr. George S. Wehrwein, a noted authority on the subject, the elaborate rules pertaining to land use indicate that the Hebrews placed great emphasis upon moral principles in dealing with their land. The moral equivalent of this rule of access by the poor is government aid to the producer so that food in abundance will be available for city dwellers without a penalty on the farmer for his exertions. Our productive capacity is tremendous, and food production is wisely left to those in the farming business rather than encouraging city unemployed to engage in subsistence farming. The surplus marketing program is a practical application of this idea. The Christian ideal requires, however, that we avoid dogmatic conclusions regarding part-time or subsistence farming. Let the problems of food production and land use be approached with the single idea of developing reasonable opportunities for the many rather than the maximum opportunities for the few.

Another valuable teaching of the early Hebrews had to do with the alienation of land. It was an intolerable idea that land should be permanently alienated from a family. In the Jubilee or fiftieth year all lands pledged or transferred for debt were returned to the mortgagor or his family. No conveyance could be effective for more than fifty years. Variations of this plan, such as the Texas law against mortgaging the homestead and the liberal moratorium statutes throughout the United States, are designed to contribute to the same social objective. Land debts are a constant threat to the farmers' security. Studies have shown that in some states as high as 80 per cent of all farms mortgaged in a twenty-year period were lost to the owner. Substantial progress is being made in meeting this situation through statutory measures and in the voluntary debt adjustments being encouraged by the Farm Security Administration and other agencies.

These interrelations of farm producer and city consumer need the sympathetic human treatment which Christianity has historically undertaken. Recently I ate breakfast with a friend who has that understanding. He is a devotee of the second cup of coffee, and as it was set before him he made this comment, "As I sit over my coffee I often think of the workers in a blistering sun, enduring inconvenience and hardship for us of the temperate zones that we might have our morning enjoyment. What are we doing in return to make their lives easier and better?" That's the idea. Let it rest upon the conscience of all Christians and add to thoughts of coffee producers, the workers in the citrus fruit orchards, the vegetable fields, and the cotton plantations. Are we doing all we can?

CEREMONY OF THE SOIL — A SERVICE OF WORSHIP*

By Howard and Alice Kester



THIS LITURGY of the Holy Earth is a Christian interpretation of God's commission to man to be the good husbandman of His vineyard. The liturgy seeks to reveal the essential unity of God, the earth, and man and the spiritual laws governing man's relation to the earth.

This ceremony is intended to be used in churches, schools, conferences of working men and farmers, cooperative and governmental meetings or wherever Christian men and women wish to acknowledge the Lordship of the Eternal God, reclaim their kinship with the Holy Earth, and dedicate themselves to the divine commission to "build the new heaven and the new earth."

The eight symbols employed in the ceremony have definite meanings which become clear as the ceremony proceeds. THE SOIL is a symbol of the earth; THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH (fruits, vegetables, coal, iron, etc.) are a symbol of the productiveness of the earth and God's goodness; THE CIRCLE OF EVERGREENS is a symbol of the continuous renewal of life on the earth and of its eternal promises; THE TRIANGLE symbolizes the common trinity of life—God, the earth, and man; THE HOE is the symbol of man's cooperation with God in making the earth fruitful; THE PLUMBLINE is the symbol of God's justice (See Amos 7:7-8); THE BIBLE symbolizes God's relation to man; THE CROSS symbolizes Christ and the Church.

In preparing for the ceremony a table should be placed in full view of the people and so situated as to permit them to pass before it to receive the soil from those distributing it. The soil should be spread upon the table and the other symbols carefully arranged about it. In the ACT OF DEDICATION at the close of the service the people are given an opportunity to receive some of the soil of the Holy Earth as a pledge to be faithful stewards of the earth. As the people present themselves to receive the soil it should be handed to them in small envelopes so that it may be kept as a symbol of their pledge of stewardship. While it is desirable that the envelopes be filled with the soil as the people are coming forward, it will be helpful to have a few envelopes already filled. It is suggested that the soil be used creatively by scattering it on the home garden or field.

It is highly important that the persons representing the "voices" of the Eternal, the Earth, Man, and the Church read their parts with conviction and clarity. They should be concealed from view if possible.

The ceremony may be strengthened if interspersed by a soloist or small group singing the ROGATE or other songs of rural life.

Reader (addressing the people): Jehovah, Our God, has brought us forth "into a good land, a land of brooks and waters, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; A land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; A land of olive trees and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper. And thou shalt eat and be full, and thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee." (Deuteronomy 8:7-10)

Reader (prayerfully, standing by the prepared table): O Thou Eternal One, Mightiest of Workmen, in the great beginning Thou didst ordain and create the ordered worlds and wrested from chaos Thy marvelous architectural splendors, appointing to each a separate task and to each a glorious purpose in an eternal plan. Thou didst establish in concord and mutuality the whole creation and didst anchor the least and the greatest of Thy mighty works upon the bed-rock of Thy everlasting covenant which was in the beginning when the first moon crossed the first man's horizon.

People: "O Lord, our God, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor." (Psalms 8:1, 3-5)

Reader: Thou art our Father for Thou didst set our feet upon Thy Holy Earth when from emerald waters Thou didst lift the earth and endow it with the miracle of life. For our companionship Thou didst fling the sun upon its life-giving journeys around the worlds, hang the moon against the night, and lantern the heavens with ten million stars.

People: For a helpmate, Thou hast given us the Holy Earth; for a friend, the blessed soil; for a comrade, the green valleys from whence we glean the yellow corn; purple prairies yielding golden grains of wheat; verdant

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deltas where white bolls of cotton hang under copper skies; the everlasting hills to serve as watchmen over Thy wonder-work. For refuge in time of trouble Thou hast given us the quiet solitude of mighty forests; for strength the power of turbulent streams, the majesty of high mountains, the ceaseless going and coming of the ocean's hands.

Reader: In Thy infinite wisdom, O Lord, Thou didst intend that a glorious companionship should exist between Thy good earth and the sons and daughters of man. The earth has freely given of her vast treasures and upon its goodness the human family has grown strong. It hath been the *great provider*, but we, the crown of Thy creation, have become the *great destroyers*. We have mutilated the earth, and destroyed her balances. We have slashed her lovely garments from mountainside and valley, leaving red gullies where once great autumn unfurled Joseph's coat on a thousand whirling leaves. We have taken from the soil the life with which Thou didst endow it. Too often we have given in exchange the wreck of exhausted fields, ruined farms, and broken homes.

People: "And I brought you into a plentiful land, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; But when ye entered ye defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination." (Jeremiah 2:7)

Reader: "Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion underfoot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it desolate, and being desolate, it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart." (Jeremiah 12:10-11)

People (prayerfully): Forgive us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, for the evil which we have done.

Reader: "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments and do them, then will I give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase and the trees of the field shall yield their fruits and your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land safely. I will give you peace in your land and ye shall lie down and none shall make you afraid." (Leviticus 26:3-6)

People: "For he is our God, And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hands." (Psalms 95:7)

Reader (prayerfully): Thou, O God, and not man madest the earth. Enable us to realize, we beseech Thee, that our relationship to the earth is a moral one: that to plunder Thy Holy Earth and waste its resources is a denial of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Reveal to us that our faithlessness to the earth is today revealed amidst the hunger, the poverty, the want and wretchedness destroying our brothers and sisters.

People: We are our brothers' keepers, but are we the keepers of the earth also?

Reader: In the beginning the ancient writer said, "There was not a man to till the ground . . . and the Lord God planted a garden eastward . . . and took the man and put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it." (Genesis 2:5, 8, 15)

People (slowly): "To dress it and to keep it!"

Reader: To dress it and to keep it; To till it and guard it forever and ever!

People: Surely Thou hast commanded us to be the keepers of the earth, dressers of the trees, friends of the soil, stewards of the Eternal.

Reader: "To dress it and to keep it"—This is the Eternal's mandate to His people.

People: God, the earth, man—These are the common trinity of life.

The Reader shall pray: We thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast called us to be the keepers of Thy Holy Earth. Forgive, we beseech Thee, the evil we have brought upon the land and the people. Make us faithful stewards and teach us to bind in love, reverence, and understanding the wounds we have made in ignorance and conceit, to the end that all Thy children may enjoy the fruits of the earth. AMEN.

First Voice: I AM THE VOICE OF THE EARTH. "Let the people hear and let the earth rejoice." I am the earth, thy dwelling place throughout all the ages.

I am the friend and the servant of the man who faithfully keeps my hills and valleys and protects my mountains and prairies. But I am also the foe of all those who ravage my fields and destroy my forests.

I am the Great Provider and I am the Great Withholder. Those who work with me I make full and those who work against me I turn away empty. I am the voice of all the once-fertile lands made desolate by man's avarice and greed. By the strength of my soil mighty empires were built and through the ruin of my soil they were brought low and laid waste. Upon the desolation you have wrought, O Man, thy children live in wretchedness and despair. When you destroy my lands, O Man, mark you a grave for your children. Listen, O Man, and live! Knowest thou not that you cannot destroy my soil and live? For how can you live if I refuse you food and drink? Canst thou create another earth and endow it with life? Thou canst plant a seed in the soil, O Man, but thou canst not make it yield the fruit of life.

Work with me, in love, O Man, and I will help you build the new heaven and the new earth, and the long-awaited deliverance of the human family will come at last.

Second Voice: I AM THE VOICE OF MAN. "Let the people hear and let the earth rejoice."

I am the voice of him who hath conquered and subdued the earth. I am also he who hath been overwhelmed by it. I am the voice of ancient empires whose greatness was born among fertile valleys and fruitful plains, whose names are now but hollow memories, and whose once-flourishing fields are but desolate wasteplaces. Thus it is that I come to you out of the bitter midnight of ancient memories pleading with you to preserve your land and save your people, protect the soil and safeguard the nation.

I saw Rome in all her glory and I was the voice of peasants crying out against the destruction of the soil. I was at Jamestown when Virginia and all the land beyond was like the Garden of Eden. I rode with the men who cleared the wilderness and my hands drove the plow that broke the plains.

I am the men and women in all ages who have loved and cherished the soil and who know that it is the mother of nations. I am the good husbandman of God's vineyard; the defender of the nation's true greatness; the ancient guardian of the people's earthright. I am the people pleading for bread, beauty, and brotherhood. It is my voice which you hear thundering down the centuries from the plains of Babylon and reaching a mighty halleluiah chorus on a thousand hills, crying, "Save the soil and save the people; comfort my land and comfort my people; build the earth anew and build the new heaven and the new earth!"

Third Voice: I AM THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH. "Let the people hear and let the earth rejoice."

In sorrow I confess that I have not always been the good shepherd of my people nor have I always guarded well the Eternal's vineyard. But these days are forever behind me for I have given my heart to the Eternal. Through His everlasting mercy I have beheld the glorious vision of the goodly fellowship of free and noble men on a free and holy earth, and my feet have at last trod upon that blessed highroad which leadeth to the City of our God. In these days I gather unto myself the wisdom of the seers and saints of all the ages, the power of holy purposes, and the glory and the majesty that was in the beginning, now and ever shall be. I lead you now, not as a wanderer upon some strange moor, but as a man who followeth a map and knoweth whither ye goeth. Come with me, my children, and I shall lead you to build against the darkness of this night the foundations of a cooperative and kindly society whose Governor shall be the Eternal God.

My children, return the land unto the people and share the earth's resources with all thy brothers. In love be ye one another's keeper and in trust be ye the keepers of the Holy Earth.

Fourth Voice: I AM THE VOICE OF THE ETERNAL. "Let the people hear and let the earth rejoice."

"The land whither ye go to possess it is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the Lord, thy God, careth for; the eyes of the Lord, thy God, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

"And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments to love the Lord, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and all your strength, that I will give you the rain of your land in its season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy grain, and thy new wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

"Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul; and ye shall bind them for a sign on your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up." (Deuteronomy 11:11-19)

The Reader and People together shall pray: Almighty God, ceaseless Creator of the everchanging worlds, awaken us to a new consciousness of man's place in Thy design for this earth. Deliver the land, O God, from those who ravage it, and the people from those who oppress them. Bless all those who work for the redemption of Thy Holy Earth and for the salvation of Thy children. Grant that their hearts may be gladdened and their hands strengthened as they fulfill Thy mandates and prepare to receive Thy promises. Amen.

ACT OF DEDICATION

Reader (placing his hand upon the soil): This is but a portion of the earth: her soil. It is our responsibility as faithful Christians to build on this earth the Kingdom of God. How can we build a world of free and noble men, women, and children when we fail to care for the life-giving soil which nourishes the people and provides the foundations of human society? How can we say that we believe in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man when we plunder the soil and rob our children of their earthright? The earth's children will become the heirs of bread, brotherhood, and beauty as they keep faith with the ancient mandates of the Eternal, and become in truth and in spirit the keepers of the Holy Earth.

People: By the help of the Eternal God, our Father, we pledge ourselves this day to become the keepers of this earth, our home and dwelling place in all ages.

Reader: And now as a token of our dedication to the responsibilities of a keeper of the Eternal's earth, let us each take a portion of this soil and use it as a reminder of our solemn obligations to our God, the earth, and man.

(The people shall now proceed to the table to receive a portion of soil.)

The Reader shall repeat as the people come forward: "And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it." . . . "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world, and all they that dwell therein." . . . "Make ye ready the way of the Lord. Make His path straight." . . . "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest."

(When the people have returned to their seats they shall stand and sing): "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

The Reader and People shall pray: We thank Thee for the dreams and visions of the glorious society on earth which calls us back to Thee. Help us in these dread hours to lay the foundations for the new heaven and the new earth. Grant that each of us here may have a share in bringing peace upon the land and in the hearts and homes of our people. Make us unsatisfied until war and all the evils from which Thy children suffer are banished from the earth. Save us from complacency, O God. And from softness and hypocrisy and blindness and stupidity, deliver us. Guide our hands and our hearts, and lead us out of the valley of the shadow of death into the sunshine of Thy everlasting hills. AMEN.

Benediction: May the Lord bless you and multiply your company and lead you ever onward in His service. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. AMEN.

This Service is available from the Christian Rural Fellowship, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y., at the following prices: single copy, five cents; 25 copies, 50 cents; 100 copies, \$1.00, postage paid.